

Tornadoes

Tornadoes are violently rotating columns of air that descend from thunderstorm clouds to come in contact with the ground. They typically develop when the following atmospheric ingredients come together:

- a supply of warm, humid air near the surface
- cool, dry air flowing from the west or southwest at the mid and high levels of the atmosphere
- a nearby low pressure system to help lift the air and create thunderstorms
- strong atmospheric winds that turn with height



Most tornadoes in Alabama occur in the spring months of March, April, and May between noon and 8 pm. A secondary tornado season occurs in the fall, typically during November and early December. However, tornadoes have occurred in every hour of each day and night, so no time is completely free from tornadoes.

Tornadoes have wind speeds that vary from as little as 60 miles an hour to speeds approaching 300 mph. They move with the thunderstorms that produces them with forward motions varying from nearly stationary to 70 mph. Most thunderstorms producing tornadoes travel from the southwest toward the northeast.

Remember, tornadoes form quickly! You may have only a few seconds to react and find shelter. When a tornado threatens, your immediate action can save your life! Know where to go!

Tornado Safety Rules

In general, get as low as you can. A basement below ground level or at least the lowest floor of a building offers the greatest safety. Put as many walls between yourself and the outside as possible. Avoid windows at all cost!

In schools, nursing homes, hospitals, factories, and shopping centers:

Go to a pre-designated shelter area. Basements are the best, but interior hallways on the lowest floor usually offer protection. Close all doors to the hallway for greater protection.

In mobile homes or vehicles:

Leave them and go to a strong building. If there is no shelter nearby, get into the nearest ditch or depression and lie flat with your hands shielding your head.

In homes or small buildings:

Go to the basement or a small interior room such as a closet, a bathroom, or an interior hall on the lowest level. If available, get under something sturdy like a heavy table. Protect yourself from flying debris with pillows, heavy coats, blankets, or quilts. Use bicycle or motorcycle helmets, if available, to protect your head.

Stay away from windows! Do not bother opening or closing them. It will not protect the structure anyway. You will waste time and put yourself and possibly others at greater risk. Use those valuable seconds to find a place of safety.

Stay away from doors, windows, and outside walls. Protect your head!